PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

The King's Kindness

Titus, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Kindness: Paul's Letter to Titus, Unfiltered

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the NIV. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. Titus is a short letter, but the saying is staying.

Titus is one of the shortest books in the New Testament. You can read it in about ten minutes. But don't let the size fool you. It contains some of the clearest summaries of the gospel anywhere in the Bible.

It's a letter from Paul to one of his most trusted coworkers, a Greek believer named Titus, who had been left on the island of Crete with a tough assignment. The churches there were new and disorganized. Some teachers were spreading confusion and making money off it. And Crete had a reputation in the ancient world that wasn't exactly flattering.

Paul's answer to all of it is surprisingly simple: grace. Not a list of rules, though the letter has instructions. Grace, the undeserved kindness of God that showed up in Jesus, rescues people, changes them from the inside out, and teaches them how to live.

That's the big idea of this letter. What you believe about God shapes how you live. And the kindness of God can change anyone, no matter where they come from or what they've done. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through all three chapters of Titus, in order, one chapter of this book for each chapter of the letter. Each one explains what Paul is saying in plain language and adds background about Crete, the early church, and the Roman world.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene introduces Titus, describes the island of Crete and its reputation, explains what was going wrong in the churches there, and briefly describes the debate over who wrote this letter. Read it first. Titus is short, so Setting the Scene is a little longer than usual.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

This book quotes Titus sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each chapter of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters from Romans to 2 Timothy, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

This book follows the letter format of the earlier volumes, walking through Titus chapter by chapter. I've quoted the letter sparingly and relied mostly on paraphrase, background, and discussion material. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

Titus 1:12 quotes an ancient Cretan poet's insult about his own people. I've explained its background and context carefully, and made clear that it is not a license to stereotype any group of people, ancient or modern. The instructions to households in 2:1–10, including the instructions to slaves, are handled briefly and with balance, in the same way as in the Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy volumes, and the differing ways Christians apply the instructions to wives are presented fairly.

The debate over the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is described briefly and fairly. The letter presents itself as Paul's, and I refer to

the author as Paul throughout. Views about the washing of rebirth in 3:5 and its relation to baptism are also presented without taking sides.

The letter's teaching on grace that trains us to live well (2:11–14) and on the kindness and love of God (3:4–7) is highlighted, along with the qualities of good leaders (1:5–9) and Paul's instruction to young men (2:6–8).

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will discover the kindness of God, and that it will change them from the inside out.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

Who Was Titus?

Titus is one of the most important people in Paul's story, but he's never mentioned in Acts. Everything we know about him comes from Paul's letters. He was a Greek, not a Jew, and he seems to have become a believer through Paul, since Paul calls him his true son in the faith (1:4).

Titus first appears when Paul takes him to Jerusalem to meet the leaders of the church there. Some believers insisted that Gentile Christians had to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law. Paul refused to let Titus be circumcised, and the Jerusalem leaders agreed. Titus became living proof that Gentiles are welcomed into God's family by grace, through faith in Jesus (Galatians 2:1–5).

Titus the Troubleshooter

Titus seems to have been the person Paul sent when things got difficult. When Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church was at its worst, Titus went to Corinth to help. He came back with good news that the church had changed its attitude, and Paul says Titus's arrival comforted him when he was discouraged (2 Corinthians 7:5–7). Titus also helped organize the offering for poor believers in Jerusalem, and Paul calls him his partner and coworker (2 Corinthians 8:16–23).

In other words, Titus was dependable, tactful, and tough. That's probably why Paul left him on Crete. Later, Titus went to Dalmatia,

on the coast of modern Croatia (2 Timothy 4:10). According to later tradition, he returned to Crete, led the church there for many years, and died there as an old man. A church dedicated to him still stands in ruins at Gortyn, the old Roman capital of the island.

The Island of Crete

Crete is a long, mountainous island in the Mediterranean Sea, south of mainland Greece. It's about 160 miles from end to end, the largest of the Greek islands. Thousands of years before Paul, it was home to the Minoans, one of the earliest advanced civilizations in Europe, who built the great palace of Knossos. Greek myths placed the labyrinth and the Minotaur there, and said the god Zeus had been born and raised in a cave on the island.

By Paul's day, Crete was part of the Roman Empire. The Romans had conquered it in the 60s BC and combined it with Cyrene, in North Africa, into a single province. The island had many towns, a lot of farmland, and busy harbors on the sea routes between Rome, Egypt, and the east.

Christianity Comes to Crete

We don't know exactly how the gospel first reached Crete. Acts mentions that there were people from Crete in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached and thousands believed (Acts 2:11). Some of them may have taken the message home. There were Jewish communities on the island, and some of the first believers there may have come from them.

Paul himself sailed along the southern coast of Crete as a prisoner on his way to Rome. His ship stopped at a harbor called Fair Havens, and Paul warned the crew not to sail on, but they ignored him and were caught in a terrible storm (Acts 27:7–21). That stop

doesn't seem to have been long enough to plant churches. So many scholars think Paul came back to Crete later, after being released from his first imprisonment in Rome, and left Titus there to finish what they'd started.

Crete's Reputation

In the ancient world, Crete had a bad reputation. Greek writers accused Cretans of lying so often that the Greek language developed a verb, kretizo, which meant to act like a Cretan, that is, to lie or cheat. Cretans were famous as skilled archers who fought as hired soldiers for whoever paid them, and the island was sometimes associated with piracy. Some writers also accused Cretans of greed.

One reason Cretans were called liars was religious. Cretans claimed to have the tomb of Zeus on their island. To other Greeks, who believed Zeus was immortal, that claim seemed like an outrageous lie. A Greek poet named Callimachus, writing around 280 BC, complained about it in a hymn to Zeus.

It's important to remember that these were stereotypes, the kind of insults neighboring peoples have always thrown at one another. Plenty of Cretans were honest, hardworking people. We'll look at how Paul uses one of these insults, and how we should and shouldn't use it, in chapter 1.

What Was Going Wrong?

The churches on Crete were young. They didn't have leaders yet, and some people were taking advantage of that. Paul describes rebellious people who talked a lot but said nothing worthwhile, and who deceived others. Many of them seem to have been Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile believers follow Jewish laws and traditions. They were interested in myths, genealogies, and

arguments about the law. They were upsetting whole families. And they were doing it for money.

Paul's response is to have Titus appoint good leaders, teach sound doctrine, and above all, help believers live lives that show the beauty of the gospel. The word good, as in good works or doing what is good, shows up again and again in this short letter.

When Was It Written?

Paul tells Titus to meet him at Nicopolis, where he planned to spend the winter (3:12). Several cities had that name, which means city of victory, but most scholars think Paul meant the Nicopolis in western Greece, founded by the emperor Augustus to celebrate a famous naval victory.

If Paul wrote Titus, it was probably written in the mid-60s AD, after his release from his first Roman imprisonment and before his final arrest, around the same time as 1 Timothy. Those who think a follower of Paul wrote it date it later, perhaps toward the end of the first century.

Who Wrote It?

Titus belongs with 1 and 2 Timothy in the group known as the Pastoral Epistles. As explained in the earlier volumes on those letters, many modern scholars think these three letters were written by a follower of Paul after his death, pointing to differences in vocabulary and style, a more developed church structure, and travel details that are hard to fit into Acts. Many other scholars believe Paul wrote them, pointing to the early church's acceptance of them as Paul's, the personal details they contain, and the possibility that Paul traveled again after the events at the end of Acts, perhaps writing with the help of a secretary. Christians on all sides agree

that the letter belongs in the Bible. In this book, I follow the letter's own claim and call the author Paul.

The Map

Chapter 1: Paul greets Titus, describes the kind of leaders the churches need, and warns about the false teachers on Crete.

Chapter 2: How different groups in the church should live, and how God's grace teaches us to live well while we wait for Jesus.

Chapter 3: How to live as good citizens and neighbors, one of the Bible's best summaries of the gospel, and Paul's final instructions.

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CHAPTER 1

Leaders Worth Following

Titus 1

Paul's opening is longer than you'd expect in such a short letter. He describes himself as God's servant and as an apostle sent by Jesus. His job, he says, is to help God's people grow in faith and in the knowledge of the truth, the kind of truth that leads to a godly life. And all of it rests on the hope of life that never ends, a promise God made long before time began. Paul adds a small but important detail: God never lies.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The God Who Doesn't Lie**
>
> It's probably no accident that Paul describes God this way at the start of a letter to people living on Crete, an island known for its liars. The gods of Greek mythology lied, cheated, and tricked people all the time. The God Paul preaches is different. Every promise He makes, He keeps. That's why you can build your life on what He says.

Now, at the right time, God has revealed that promise through the message Paul was given to preach. Paul then greets Titus as his true son in the faith they share and wishes him grace and peace.

Then Paul gets to the point. He left Titus on Crete to finish organizing the churches there and to appoint elders in every town. The NIV footnote says the word for appoint can also mean ordain.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Unfinished Business**

Paul admits that he left things unfinished on Crete. Even the great apostle couldn't do everything himself. He trusted Titus to finish the job. God's work is always a team effort, and it always involves passing responsibility to the next person. Someday someone may leave you with unfinished business to take care of. Paul's confidence in Titus is a reminder that being trusted is an honor.

Then Paul describes the kind of person who should be an elder. The list is similar to the one in 1 Timothy 3, and once again, it's almost entirely about character.

An elder must have a reputation that no one can rightly attack. He must be faithful to his wife. His children should be believers, and they shouldn't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. The NIV footnote says this could also mean his children are trustworthy.

Paul then calls the elder an overseer, which shows that the two words refer to the same role. Because he's in charge of the household that belongs to God, his life must be beyond criticism. He can't be arrogant or bossy, quick to lose his temper, a heavy drinker, violent, or greedy for money he hasn't earned honestly.

Instead, he must be welcoming to strangers, love goodness, be sensible, fair, devoted to God, and disciplined. And he must hold tight to the reliable message he was taught, so he'll be able to encourage people with healthy teaching and correct those who oppose it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Elders and Overseers**

Titus 1:5–7 is one of the clearest places in the New Testament where elder and overseer are used for the same people. Elder comes from a word meaning an older person and emphasizes maturity and respect. Overseer emphasizes the job: watching over and caring for a church. Today, churches organize

leadership in different ways. Some have bishops, priests, and deacons. Some have pastors and elder boards. Some have congregational votes. All of them look to passages like this one to describe what a leader should be like.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Faithful to His Wife, Again**

As in 1 Timothy, the Greek phrase is literally a one-woman man. Christians understand it in different ways: as ruling out polygamy, as ruling out remarriage after divorce, or most commonly as describing a man who is completely faithful in marriage. Christians also differ on whether this list means that only men can serve as elders, just as they differ on 1 Timothy 2:12, which the 1 Timothy volume in this series discusses in detail.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What about His Kids?**

Paul says an elder's children should be believers, or perhaps trustworthy, and not wild or disobedient. This doesn't mean that parents are to blame for every choice their children make, or that a leader is disqualified if a grown child walks away from faith. Paul seems to be talking about children still living at home and about the overall atmosphere of the family. If a man's household is chaotic and out of control, that's a sign he isn't ready to lead a church. If you're the child of a pastor or church leader, you know there can be a lot of pressure. Your parent's job doesn't make you responsible for their ministry. But your choices do affect your family.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Leadership Checklist**

Look at the qualities in verses 7 and 8. Not bossy. Not hot-tempered. Not a drunk. Not violent. Not greedy. Welcoming. Loves what is good. Self-controlled. Fair. Devoted to God. Disciplined. You don't have to be a church elder to work on these. Team captains, student council members, older siblings, and anyone with friends who look up to them can use this list. Which of these qualities do people see in you?

Why does Titus need such good leaders? Because, Paul says, there are many people on Crete who refuse to submit to anyone. They talk a lot, but it's empty talk, and they deceive people. Many of them

belong to the circumcision group, Jewish Christians who taught that Gentile believers had to keep the Jewish law. They have to be stopped, Paul says, because they're turning whole families upside down, teaching things they shouldn't, and doing it to make money.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Circumcision Group**

If you've read the Galatians volume in this series, you know about this group. They taught that faith in Jesus wasn't enough; Gentiles also had to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law to be fully accepted by God. Paul strongly opposed that. He wasn't against Jewish people. He was Jewish himself, and so were Jesus and all the first apostles. He was against any teaching that added requirements to God's grace. Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, was the perfect person to stand against this group.

Then comes the verse that makes many readers uncomfortable. Paul quotes one of Crete's own prophets, who said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." And Paul adds that this saying is true.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Said It?**

The NIV footnote says the quote comes from the Cretan philosopher Epimenides, who probably lived around 600 BC. Ancient writers described him as a poet, prophet, and wise man, and many legends grew up around him, including one that he slept in a cave for fifty-seven years. Some scholars think Paul may also quote a line from Epimenides in Acts 17:28, when he tells the Athenians that in God we live and move and have our being. Paul knew the poets of the Greek world and used their words to communicate with Greek audiences.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Liar Paradox**

Epimenides' line became famous among philosophers for another reason. If a Cretan says that all Cretans are always liars, is he telling the truth? If he is, then he's lying, because he's a Cretan. If he's lying, then some Cretans tell the truth. This puzzle, known as the liar paradox, has been debated by

philosophers and logicians for centuries. Paul probably wasn't thinking about the logic puzzle at all. But it's a fun question to argue about.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Handle with Care**

So was Paul saying that every person from Crete was a liar, a brute, and a glutton? No. Notice a few things. First, Paul is quoting a Cretan describing his own people, the way people sometimes joke about their own hometown or culture. Second, Paul uses the quote to describe the false teachers specifically, the people who were deceiving others for money. When he says the saying is true, he means it's true of them. Third, the churches Paul loved on Crete were made up of Cretans, and Titus was spending his life serving them. Paul believed God's grace could transform anyone. That's the whole point of the letter. Finally, the New Testament teaches that in Christ there's no room for looking down on any ethnic group (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). This verse should never be used to stereotype people from Crete, Greece, or anywhere else. Using it that way would be the opposite of what Paul is doing.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Stereotypes Today**

Stereotypes are everywhere: jokes about people from a certain country, state, city, or school; assumptions based on race, accent, religion, or how much money someone has. They can seem harmless, but they make it easy to stop seeing people as individuals. And they hurt. Jesus constantly crossed lines that people of His time drew between groups: Jews and Samaritans, insiders and outsiders, respectable people and sinners. Before you laugh at or repeat a stereotype, ask whether it treats someone the way Jesus would.

Because of how serious the problem is, Paul tells Titus to correct these people firmly, so that they'll have a healthy faith and stop paying attention to Jewish myths and to rules made up by people who have turned their backs on the truth.

Then Paul makes a famous statement: to people who are pure, everything is pure. But to people who are corrupt and don't believe, nothing is pure, because their minds and consciences are polluted.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Pure Things**
>
> The false teachers seem to have been obsessed with rules about purity: which foods were clean and which weren't, what you could touch and what you couldn't. Jesus taught that it's not what goes into a person that makes them unclean, but what comes out of their heart (Mark 7:14–23). Paul's point is that purity is a matter of the heart. A pure heart can enjoy God's good gifts with thanks. A corrupt heart can twist even good things into something ugly. This verse doesn't mean anything goes, though. Paul is talking about the false teachers' rules, not about things God's word clearly calls sin.

Paul ends the chapter with a sharp description. These people claim to know God, but their actions deny Him. They're disobedient and useless for anything good.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Say and Do**
>
> Paul's harshest criticism isn't about what the false teachers believed, though that mattered. It's that their lives didn't match their words. They said they knew God, but you'd never know it from how they acted. That's a challenge for all of us. Does the way you live back up what you say you believe? People notice when it doesn't.

KEY VERSE

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

Titus 1:8 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Paul's list of qualities for leaders is almost all about character. Why do you think character matters more than talent in a leader?
2. Which quality on Paul's list would you most like other people to see in you?
3. Why do you think Paul quoted a Cretan poet's insult? How should Christians respond to stereotypes about any group of people?
4. Is there any area of your life where your actions don't match what you say you believe?

TRY THIS *This week, pay attention to the jokes and comments you hear about different groups of people, at school, online, or at home. When you hear a stereotype, don't repeat it. If you can, gently push back. And pray for someone from a group that's often looked down on.*

CHAPTER 2

Grace That Teaches

Titus 2

Paul tells Titus that he, unlike the false teachers, must teach what fits with sound doctrine. Then Paul shows what that looks like in everyday life, group by group.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Doctrine You Can See**
>
> Doctrine just means teaching, especially the core beliefs of the Christian faith. Some people think doctrine is boring or only for scholars. But in Titus, Paul connects doctrine with how people live, again and again. Sound doctrine produces healthy lives. What you believe about God shows up in how you treat your family, your friends, and the people you work for. You could say that your life is the best evidence of what you actually believe.

First, older men. They should be sober-minded, respected, self-controlled, and healthy in their faith, their love, and their perseverance.

Second, older women. They should live in a way that honors God. They shouldn't spread rumors or be addicted to wine. Instead, they should teach what is good. They can encourage the younger women to love the husbands and kids in their lives, to have self-control and purity, to manage their homes, to be kind, and to submit to their husbands, so that nobody has a reason to speak badly of God's word.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Older Teaching Younger**

Notice that Paul expects older women to teach and mentor younger women. That's not a minor role. In a world where women had few opportunities for education, Paul gives them an important ministry in the church. And the whole passage assumes a church where generations know one another, learn from one another, and care for one another. Do you know any older believers at your church? They have a lot to teach you, and you probably have something to teach them too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Reading 2:4–5 Today**

Paul's instructions to young women reflect the culture of his day, when most women married young and worked mainly in the household, which was often also a family business. Christians apply these verses in different ways today. Some believe they describe a lasting pattern, with husbands leading lovingly and wives supporting that leadership, and many in this group also encourage women to work outside the home when it fits their family. Others believe Paul's main concern was the church's reputation in that culture, and that today the same concern for the gospel's reputation might look different, with husbands and wives sharing leadership equally. Both views agree on a lot. As in Ephesians 5, where Paul tells all believers to submit to one another and tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church, marriage is meant to be a partnership of love and respect, never control or abuse. And Paul's reason is clear in both views: live in a way that makes the gospel look good.

Third, young men. Titus should encourage them to be self-controlled. That's all Paul says. One word, essentially. But it's a word that covers almost everything: anger, desires, words, money, screen time, and how you treat people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Self-Control**

Self-control shows up again and again in Titus: for elders (1:8), older men (2:2), younger women (2:5), young men (2:6), and everyone (2:12). In Crete, a culture where people had a reputation for doing whatever they wanted, this

was countercultural. It's countercultural today too. Our world says that if you want something, you should have it, now. Self-control means being able to say no to what you want in the moment for the sake of what you want most. The good news is that self-control isn't something you have to manufacture by yourself. Paul lists it as part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). God grows it in you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Set an Example**

Paul tells Titus, who was probably a fairly young man himself, to set an example for the young men by doing good in everything. In his teaching, he should show integrity and seriousness, and his message should be so healthy that no one can criticize it. That way, opponents will be embarrassed because they can't find anything bad to say. It's very similar to Paul's words to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12). Young people can be examples, not just learn from them.

Fourth, slaves. Paul tells Titus to teach slaves to submit to their masters in all things, to work at pleasing them, not to argue with them, and not to steal. Instead, they should show that they can be completely trusted, so that their lives make the teaching about God attractive.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Slavery in Titus**

As in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy, Paul is writing to believers living in a world where slavery was a normal part of life, and where enslaved people could do little to change their situation. Historians estimate that a large portion of people in the Roman world were enslaved, though the numbers are uncertain and varied from place to place. Paul's instructions here are about how believers could live faithfully in that situation, not an endorsement of slavery. Elsewhere, Paul encourages enslaved believers to gain their freedom if they can (1 Corinthians 7:21), condemns slave traders (1 Timothy 1:10), and teaches that slave and free are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Notice too what Paul says about slaves here: their lives could adorn the teaching about God. Society treated them as property, but Paul treats them as people whose lives

can display the beauty of the gospel. Over time, the Christian conviction that every person bears God's image helped lead many believers to fight to end slavery.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Making the Gospel Attractive**

The word Paul uses in verse 10 for making the teaching attractive is the word you'd use for arranging jewels or decorating something beautifully. It's where we get the English word cosmetic. Your life can make the good news about Jesus look beautiful to the people around you, or ugly. Most people won't read the Bible. But they'll read you.

Then Paul explains why all this matters, in one of the most beautiful passages in the letter. God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation for everyone. And this grace doesn't just forgive us. It teaches us. It trains us to say no to godlessness and to the desires this world pushes on us, and to live sensible, right, and godly lives here and now, while we wait for what Paul calls the blessed hope. That hope is the day when the glory of Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, is revealed.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Grace Is a Teacher**

Some people think that if God forgives everything, it doesn't matter how we live. Others think the only way to make people live right is with strict rules and threats. Paul says neither. Grace itself is a teacher. The word Paul uses was used for training and raising children. When you really understand how much God loves you and what Jesus did for you, it changes what you want. You don't obey God to earn His love. You obey because you already have it. Grace says no to some things and yes to others, and it changes you from the inside out.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Our Great God and Savior**

Verse 13 is one of several places in the New Testament where Jesus seems to be called God directly. Most translations, including the NIV, read it as describing one person, Jesus, who is both our great God and Savior. A few

translations read it as describing two persons, God and the Savior Jesus Christ. Most scholars think the NIV reading is the more natural one grammatically. Either way, the letter makes something interesting clear: Paul calls God our Savior and Jesus our Savior, sometimes in back-to-back verses (1:3–4; 3:4–6). Christians believe that's because Jesus is God, the Son, who came to save us.

Paul says that Jesus gave Himself for us, to set us free from all wickedness and to make us clean, His own special people, eager to do good.

BACKGROUND CHECK **His Very Own**

The idea of a people that belong to God comes from the Old Testament, where God calls Israel His treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6). Paul says that through Jesus, God has formed a people who belong to Him, made up of Jews and Gentiles, Cretans and Greeks and everyone else. You're not just a forgiven individual. You're part of a family, God's very own people. And notice what marks that people: they're eager to do good. Not grudgingly, not because they have to, but eagerly.

Paul ends the chapter by telling Titus to teach these things, to encourage and correct with full authority, and not to let anyone disregard him.

KEY VERSE

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11–14 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What's one way older believers have helped you? What could you learn from an older Christian in your church?
2. Where do you find self-control hardest? What would help?
3. What do you think it means that grace teaches us? How is that different from rules and threats?
4. Is your life making the gospel look attractive to the people around you? What's one thing that could change?

TRY THIS *Pick one area where you want to grow in self-control, like your phone, your temper, your words, or your eating. Set one small, specific limit for this week, and each time you keep it, thank God for His grace that's teaching you.*

CHAPTER 3

Kindness Appeared

Titus 3

Paul tells Titus to remind the believers to respect rulers and authorities, to obey them, and to be ready to do good. They shouldn't slander anyone, but should be peaceful and considerate, and gentle toward everyone.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Good Citizens**

Paul's instruction to respect authorities is similar to Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17. In the first century, Christians were a small, misunderstood group, and some people suspected them of being troublemakers. Paul wanted believers to be known as the best neighbors and citizens in town. Christians have always discussed the limits of this. When rulers command something God forbids, the apostles said we must obey God rather than people (Acts 5:29). But in everyday life, Paul's words are clear: be respectful, be helpful, be kind.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Gentle toward Everyone**

Paul says believers should show true gentleness toward everyone. Not just to other Christians, not just to people who are nice to them, but everyone. On Crete, the believers' neighbors probably included people who mocked them, cheated them, or worshiped other gods. Paul says to be gentle with all of them. That includes the kid who annoys you, the teacher you don't like, and the person who disagrees with you online.

Why should believers be so gentle with people who don't know God? Because, Paul says, we used to be just like them. We were once foolish and disobedient ourselves. We were fooled, and we were slaves to every kind of craving and pleasure. We lived with hatred and envy. People hated us, and we hated each other.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **We Too**
>
> Notice that Paul says we. He includes himself. Before he met Jesus, Paul was a religious man, but he was also full of anger and hatred toward Christians (1 Timothy 1:13). It's easy for church people to look down on people who aren't Christians. Paul says, remember where you came from. Anyone who has been rescued by grace has no right to look down on anyone else.

But then everything changed. And Paul describes how in one of the clearest summaries of the gospel in the Bible. When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us. Not because of the good things we'd done, but because of His mercy.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Kindness**
>
> The Greek word for love in verse 4 is philanthropia, which gives us philanthropy. It means love for humanity. In the Roman world, people praised emperors and rich benefactors for their philanthropy, their generosity to cities and citizens. Paul says the true philanthropy, the greatest act of kindness the world has ever seen, came from God when Jesus appeared. And it wasn't given to people who deserved it. It was given to people who were foolish, disobedient, and full of hatred.

God saved us, Paul says, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus. The result is that, made right with God by His grace, we have become heirs, with the hope of eternal life.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Washing of Rebirth**

What does Paul mean by the washing of rebirth? Christians have understood it in different ways. Many, including Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and some other churches, believe it refers to baptism, through which God gives new birth. Many other Christians believe it describes the spiritual cleansing and new birth that the Holy Spirit brings when someone believes, of which baptism is an outward sign. Either way, the point is that God is the one who washes us and makes us new. Jesus talked about the same idea when He told Nicodemus that people must be born again, of water and the Spirit (John 3:3–5).

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Whole Trinity**

Look at verses 4 to 6 again. God our Savior shows His kindness. The Holy Spirit renews us. Jesus Christ our Savior is the one through whom the Spirit is poured out. The word Trinity doesn't appear in the Bible, but passages like this one show why Christians came to believe in one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all working together to save us.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Heirs**

An heir is someone who will receive an inheritance. In the Roman world, people often adopted adult heirs to carry on their family name and receive their property. Paul says that God has made us His heirs. Everything that belongs to God's family is ours, and the best part is still to come: eternal life with Him. You may not feel rich, important, or secure. But if you belong to Jesus, you have an inheritance that can never be taken away (1 Peter 1:4).

Paul says this is a trustworthy saying, the last of the five trustworthy sayings in the Pastoral Epistles. He wants Titus to emphasize these truths, so that people who trust God will make sure to give themselves to doing good. These things are excellent, Paul says, and helpful for everybody.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Saved for Good Works**

Paul is very clear in verse 5: we're not saved because of good things we've done. But in verse 8, and verse 14, and throughout this letter, Paul talks about doing good. Is that a contradiction? Not at all. We're not saved by good works, but we're saved for good works (Ephesians 2:8–10). Good works aren't the root of salvation. They're the fruit. A tree doesn't produce apples to become an apple tree. It produces apples because it already is one.

But Titus should stay away from foolish controversies, genealogies, and fights about the law. They're pointless and don't help anyone.

As for people who cause division, Paul says to warn them once, then a second time. After that, Titus should have nothing more to do with them. People like that, Paul says, are twisted and sinful, and they're condemning themselves.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Divisive People**

The word Paul uses for divisive is the Greek word that gives us the English word heretic. Originally it meant someone who chose to form a faction or split a group. Paul isn't talking about people who ask honest questions or disagree respectfully. He's talking about people who keep stirring up conflict and dividing the church, even after being warned. Notice that Paul gives them two warnings first. The goal is always to win people back. But sometimes, for the health of a community, people who refuse to stop causing harm need to be removed. That's true in friend groups too. You can love someone and still set boundaries with them.

Paul ends with personal notes. He plans to send Artemas or Tychicus to Crete, probably to replace Titus, and he asks Titus to come to him at Nicopolis, where he's decided to spend the winter. Tychicus also shows up in Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy as one of Paul's trusted messengers. We don't know anything else about Artemas.

Paul also asks Titus to do all he can for Zenas the lawyer and for Apollos and make sure they have everything they need. Zenas may have been an expert in Roman law or in the Jewish law. Apollos was the gifted preacher from Alexandria who had worked in Corinth (Acts 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 3:6). They may have been the ones carrying this letter to Crete.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Helping People on Their Way**

Traveling in the ancient world was hard and expensive, and there were few hotels that respectable people would stay in. Christians helped missionaries and other believers by giving them food, money, and a place to stay, and by sending them on their way. That's still a great way to serve. You might help support a missionary, welcome a new student, or make sure a visitor at church feels at home.

Paul repeats his theme one last time. Believers must learn to give themselves to doing good, so they can meet urgent needs and live productive lives. Then Paul passes on greetings from everyone with him, sends greetings to all who love him in the faith, and closes with a blessing of grace for them all.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Productive Lives**

Paul's last instruction is very practical. Learn to do good, especially when people have urgent needs. Don't waste your life. You don't have to wait until you're an adult to do this. You can learn now: helping at home, volunteering, serving at church, being a good friend, noticing people who are struggling. The Cretans had a reputation for being lazy. Paul says that people who've been changed by God's kindness should be known for exactly the opposite.

KEY VERSE

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4–7 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Paul wanted Christians to be known as good citizens and neighbors?
2. Paul reminds believers of what they used to be like. How does remembering your own need for grace change how you treat others?
3. What do you think is the difference between being saved by good works and being saved for good works?
4. What urgent needs do you see around you? How could you help meet one of them?

TRY THIS *This week, do one act of kindness for someone who can't pay you back, and don't tell anyone about it. Let it be a small picture of the kindness God showed you.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just read one of the shortest letters in the Bible. But it's packed with the good news. Paul says that God's kindness and love appeared in Jesus, and that God saved us, not because of anything good we'd done, but because of His mercy.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He's kind.

God made you on purpose, and He wants you to know Him. His grace is for everyone.

> *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.* **Titus 2:11 (NIV)**

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus came for you.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. He didn't wait for us to clean up our lives first.

> *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* **Romans 5:8 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. His grace will teach you a new way to live.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for Your kindness and mercy, and that Jesus died for me. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want to*

follow Him as my King. Make me new by Your Spirit, and teach me to live Your way. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Titus straight through. It takes about ten minutes. Then read Philemon, the next letter in the New Testament, Paul's short, personal letter about a runaway slave.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Find an older believer who can mentor you, the way Paul mentored Titus. Ask about being baptized.

Talk to God every day. Be honest with Him. Thank Him for His kindness. He can handle anything you bring Him.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Talk to someone you trust. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Paul is right, the kindness of God has shown up in Jesus, and it's worth finding out for yourself.

Grace be with you all.

Titus 3:15 (NIV)